



Joint Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding, March 4, 2013

**Testimony of Howard Rifkin on SB 842, An Act
Authorizing and Adjusting Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements, Transportation and Other
Purposes**

Sen. Fonfara, Rep. Widlitz, Sen. Frantz, Rep. Williams, and Members of the Committee:

I'm Howard Rifkin, the Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC), a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness, expanding the creation of affordable housing, and fostering best practices in community development.

I am here to testify on Senate Bill 842, as it relates to the proposed capital funds for the Governor's FY14-15 Housing Initiative. The PSC strongly supports the commitments to affordable and supportive housing and housing incentive zones, and the sustained investments in public housing revitalization in the proposed biennial budget.

The PSC staffs and manages the Reaching Home Campaign, the statewide effort to prevent and end homelessness. Reaching Home is guided by a large and diverse Steering Committee working across systems, such as housing, health, education, job training, and food insecurity and includes key members of state and local government, the business community, and others. Over the past year, the Reaching Home Campaign developed action plans for implementing the *Opening Doors- CT Framework*. Opening Doors - CT is aligned with the federal *Opening Doors Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*.

The goal is to develop a coordinated statewide housing assistance system with a range of housing options and supports, use data and research to target these resources effectively, bring best practices to scale, and meet the identified demand. Through an extensive planning process, we have determined the estimated supply and demand for housing assistance, in order to end homelessness among veterans and people who are chronically homeless in five years, and children, youth and families in 10 years. The following resources proposed in this bill represent significant advancements toward meeting these demands:

- **Affordable Housing.** Authorization for \$136 million in capital funding over the biennium (\$68 million in each year) to develop or rehabilitate affordable housing across the state and increase the affordable housing options for workers, young professionals, and low-income families.
- **Public Housing Revitalization.** Authorization for \$60 million in bonding (\$30 million in each year) as years two and three of a ten year commitment of \$300 million to preserve and upgrade this housing, bringing deteriorated and vacant units back on line.
- **Supportive Housing.** Authorization for \$20 million to develop 100 new units of supportive housing.



The Governor has requested appropriations to annualize 300 new RAPs (rental assistance subsidies) to combine with the Public Housing units to ensure an adequate ongoing revenue stream to prevent future deterioration. Access to deeply subsidized affordable housing is central to efforts to prevent and homelessness. Both of these funding sources will be critical for addressing the needs of at-risk families and individuals and providing for additional units targeted to those who are homeless.

Appropriations have also been requested to annualize \$1 million for rental assistance subsidies and \$1 million for services to complete the Supportive Housing model for the 100 units of development. Supportive housing is a successful and cost-effective approach to addressing homelessness by creating permanent affordable housing with services. There is overwhelming evidence that supportive housing leads individuals and families from homelessness to stability and success, and it reduces their use of high-cost public services like emergency rooms (ER), prisons, and nursing homes.

PSC also staffs and manages HOMEConnecticut, a statewide campaign aimed at increasing the stock of affordable housing in Connecticut. The focus is on creating more affordable housing options to improve economic growth and opportunity. The Governor proposes **\$1 million for Housing Incentive Zones** in the Capital Budget. The funding will go toward financial incentive payments that help municipalities plan for and create mixed-income housing. Mixed-income housing is critical to attracting and retaining young professionals, working families, retirees, and people in public service jobs. There are some 50 communities looking at the possibility of creating Incentive Housing Zones. This funding would provide them with the technical assistance and planning support necessary to do so.

We strongly encourage you to support these critical investments, especially in light of the affordable housing crisis that we are facing and drastic cuts at the federal level.

Thank you very much.

